United Nations A/AC.172/2012/L.3

General Assembly

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Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2012

Draft report

Rapporteur: Mr. Felix **Datuowei** (Nigeria)

I. Organizational matters

A. Membership

1. In its resolution 43/222 B, the General Assembly decided to retain the Committee on Conferences as a permanent subsidiary organ. Pursuant to the provisions of that resolution, in 2012 the Committee was composed of the following Member States: Austria, China, the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Japan, Libya, Namibia, Nigeria, Panama, the Philippines, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).[1]

B. Officers

2. At its organizational session for 2012 (517th meeting), held on 25 April 2012, the Committee elected the following officers to serve in 2012:

Chair:
Carolina **Popovici** (Republic of Moldova)

Vice-Chairs:[2]
Maria Angela **Holzmann** (Austria)
Carmen **Ávila** (Panama)

Rapporteur:
Felix **Datuowei** (Nigeria)

[1] One seat from the Latin American and Caribbean States and one seat from the Asia-Pacific States have remained vacant since the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly (see A/67/107 and A/AC.172/2012/INF/1).

[2] There was no nominee from the Asia-Pacific States.

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3. At the same meeting of its organizational session, the Committee agreed in principle that the Chair would undertake informal consultations with a view to determining the composition of its Bureau for 2013 and that the outgoing Chair and members of the Bureau would continue in their capacity until the 2013 Bureau was elected.

C. Organization of work

4. At the same meeting session, the Committee decided to adopt at its substantive session the dates for its organizational and substantive sessions for the following year so that the dates would be included in the calendar of conferences and meetings. The Committee also agreed to follow the guidelines adopted in 1994 and 1995 with regard to its consideration of intersessional departures from the approved calendar of conferences and meetings and to meet, as required, to review proposals affecting the schedule of conferences and meetings during sessions of the General Assembly.

5. Also, at the same meeting, the Committee reviewed the proposed strategic framework for the period 2014-2015, programme 1, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and conference management, as contained in document A/67/6 (Prog. 1). The recommendations of the Committee were transmitted in a letter dated 1 May 2012 from the Chair of the Committee on Conferences to the Chair of the Committee for Programme and Coordination and were included in a note by the Secretariat on the proposed strategic framework for the period 2014-2015: review of part two: biennial programme plan by sectoral, functional and regional bodies (see E/AC.51/2012/CRP.1, annexes I and II).

6. At the 517th meeting, on 25 April, the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, Shaaban M. Shaaban addressed the Committee and introduced the proposed strategic framework (A/67/6 (Prog. 1)). Statements were made by the representatives of the Russian Federation, the United States, Austria, France, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria.

7. The Committee convened its substantive session from 4 to 10 September 2012 (518th to _____ meetings). At the opening of the substantive session on 4 September, the Acting Head of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, Jean-Jacques Graisse introduced the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/67/127). Statements were made by the representatives of _____.

D. Programme of work

8. At its organizational session for 2011 (510th meeting), held on 20 April 2011, the Committee requested that the Secretariat submit the provisional agenda for 2012 to the Committee at its organizational session for 2012. At its organizational session for 2012, the Committee adopted the provisional agenda (A/AC.172/2012/L.1) and requested that the Secretariat submit a provisional agenda for 2013 to the Committee at its organizational session for 2013. The Committee also decided to include in its programme of work for the year, prior to the Committee's substantive session or upon request, informal briefings by the Secretariat on issues related to conference management that are of interest to Member States.

E. Participation of observers

9. Two Member States were represented as observers at the organizational session: Egypt and Senegal. The following four Member States and an intergovernmental organization were represented as observers at the substantive session of the Committee: Cuba, Egypt, Peru, Senegal and the International Organization of La Francophonie.

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I. Calendar of conferences and meetings

A. Requests for exceptions to section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243

1. At its 518th meeting, on 4 September 2012, the Committee on Conferences considered the sections of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (see A/67/127, sect. I.A.1, and supplementary information,[1] sect. I) containing requests for exceptions to section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243, by which the Assembly decided that no subsidiary organ of the Assembly might meet at United Nations Headquarters during a regular session of the Assembly unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly.

Conclusions and recommendations

2. **The Committee on Conferences recommended that the General Assembly should explicitly authorize the following bodies to meet in New York during the main part of its sixty-seventh session, on the understanding that all such meetings would be allocated conference services on an "as available" basis, in such a way that the work of the Assembly and its Main Committees would not be impeded:**

(a) **United Nations Board of Auditors;**

(b) **Committee on Relations with the Host Country;**

(c) **Independent Audit Advisory Committee;**

(d) **Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People;**

[1] See http://dgacm.org/CoC/Report_of_the_SG_on_the_pattern_of_conferences_(A-67-127)_Supplementary_information.pdf.

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(e) **Disarmament Commission;**

(f) **Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women;**

(g) **Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East;**

(h) **United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination;**

(i) **States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.**

B. Adoption of the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2013 and related matters

Introduction and overview

3. At its 521st meeting, on 7 September 2012, the Committee reviewed the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2013 (A/AC.172/2012/L.2).

Discussion

4. Clarification was requested as to the discrepancy between the dates of the resumed session of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations contained in its decision on its meeting dates for 2013 and those of the resumed session of the Committee, as reflected in the revised draft calendar of conferences and meetings for 2013.

5. A representative of the Secretariat said that the dates of the resumed session of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations had been included in the revised draft calendar after confirmation by the secretariat and the Bureau of the Committee. Clarification would be sought from the secretariat of the Committee regarding the discrepancy.

C. Intersessional departures for 2012 and related matters

6. The General Assembly, in its resolution 66/233, approved the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2012 and 2013, as submitted by the Committee on Conferences, and authorized the Committee to make any adjustments that might become necessary as a result of actions and decisions taken by the Assembly at its sixty-sixth session. The calendar was issued as document A/AC.172/2012/2.

7. At its 373rd meeting, on 26 August 1994, the Committee decided that, in future, requests for intersessional departures submitted to the Committee should be reviewed by the Bureau, in consultation with the Secretariat, for subsequent action.

8. At its 379th meeting, on 23 March 1995, the Committee agreed that proposed changes to the calendar that did not have programme budget implications could be dealt with by the Secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau of the Committee.

9. At its substantive session of 1995, the Committee decided that requests for intersessional departures submitted to the Committee that involved a change of venue should be referred to the members for approval. Departures that involved

other types of changes, as decided upon by the Committee at its substantive session of 1994, should be reviewed by the Bureau, in consultation with the Secretariat, for subsequent action.

10. The Committee on Conferences approved one request received in 2012 from the Commission on the Status of Women to hold an additional meeting at the conclusion of its session. The Committee noted the request of the Fifth Committee for an additional meeting to conclude its work at its second resumed session.

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III. Meetings management

A. Utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

1. Meeting statistics of United Nations organs and consultations with bodies concerning utilization of conference-servicing resources

1. At its 518th meeting, on 4 September 2012, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences containing statistical data and analysis of the planned and actual utilization of conference resources allocated to a core sample of bodies that met at New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi in 2011 (see A/67/127, paras. 4-15 and supplementary information, sect. II). The report recommended that the General Assembly should urge the six intergovernmental bodies whose average utilization factor for the past 10 years had been below the benchmark of 80 per cent to adjust their programmes of work at the planning stage, in order to reduce the waste of conference services. In addition, it was suggested that the Committee should consider whether there was a need to prepare the provisional biennial calendar of conferences and meetings in the economic, social and related fields for review by the Economic and Social Council.

2. The Committee also heard an oral report by the Chair on her mandate to hold consultations with the three intergovernmental bodies that had utilized less than the benchmark of 80 per cent of their allocated resources for the past three consecutive years: the Committee on Contributions, the Commission for Social Development and the Statistical Commission. As a result, those committees had tentatively agreed to reduce their number of planned meetings. The Chair had also sent a letter offering suggestions to improve the utilization factor of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the single Geneva-based intergovernmental body that had utilized less than the established benchmark.

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Discussion

3. Several delegations questioned the feasibility of the recommendation made in the report on the pattern of conferences (A/67/127, para. 15) that the General Assembly should invite the Economic and Social Council to reconsider the need to review its provisional biennial calendar of conferences in the economic, social and related fields, as such a measure could have an impact on the legislative mandate of those bodies and could infringe on the prerogatives of the Economic and Social Council. Details were requested concerning measures, in addition to correspondence and meetings, that had been taken to ensure a more efficient use of conference services. An observer delegation noted that the functions and needs of each body should be taken into account before any measures were implemented, noting that several bodies required time to conduct extensive informal consultations. More information was requested concerning the criteria used to select the bodies to be included in the proposed expanded core sample used for data analysis.

4. A representative of the Secretariat said that the recommendation concerning the calendar of the Economic and Social Council had been made pursuant to General Assembly resolution 66/233, which requested the Secretary-General to identify duplication of work in conference services. The secretariat of the Council had been consulted when the recommendation had been drafted. Moreover, in its decision 1988/103, the Council had decided to invite the Committee on Conferences to make recommendations on the Council's calendar. Any decision made by the Committee in that regard would be brought to the attention of the Bureau of the Economic and Social Council. Alternatively, a single United Nations calendar could be prepared, and the Committee could make separate recommendations to the Council and the Assembly.

5. Starting in 2012, meetings services reports were sent to the secretariats of intergovernmental bodies before the start of their sessions, providing data on the utilization of conference resources over the past three years, in order to promote their efficient use. The secretariats were also urged to provide advance notice of foreseeable cancellations of meetings and to reduce the time allotted to meeting blocks when less time was required. In order to collect useful data, the bodies in the core sample only included intergovernmental bodies that met on a regular basis. Those that met on an ad hoc basis or that had a limited mandate were not considered.

2. Provision of interpretation services to meetings of bodies entitled to meet "as required"

6. At the same meeting, the Committee also considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning the provision of interpretation services to the meetings of bodies entitled to meet "as required" (see A/67/127, para. 16, and supplementary information, sect. III). The provision of services in New York had increased to 96 per cent in 2011, from 94 per cent in 2010.

3. Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States

7. Also at its 518th meeting, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning the provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member

States (see A/67/127, para. 17 and supplementary information, sect. IV). In New York, 92 per cent of requests had been met in 2011, as compared to 96 per cent in 2010, while in Geneva, 89 per cent of requests had been met in 2011, as compared with 59 per cent in 2010.

Discussion

8. One delegation asked whether the decrease in the percentage of requests met in New York had been owing to last-minute cancellations of those requests, and if that was the case, what were the reasons for the cancellations. Another delegation wished to know whether or not there was a need for interpretation services among regional groupings in Vienna and Nairobi.

9. A representative of the Secretariat replied that Vienna and Nairobi only had the capacity of a single team of interpreters, which generally supported calendar bodies. In Nairobi, it had been possible to meet one request for provision of interpretation services to regional groupings of Member States in 2011. The decrease in requests met in New York had been owing to cancellations by the regional groupings; explanations were not documented, although the groupings could be asked to provide the reasons for the cancellations.

4. Utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi

10. Also at the 518th meeting, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/67/127, para. 18). In 2011, all meetings of Nairobi-based bodies had been held in Nairobi, in conformity with the headquarters rule.

5. Utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa

11. At the same meeting, the Committee also considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning the utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) (A/67/127, paras. 19-21). In 2011, the United Nations conference centre at ECA hosted and serviced 4,767 meetings, representing a utilization rate of 70 per cent, unchanged from 2010. The zero growth was attributable to the net effect of an aggressive marketing campaign and an increase in the number of hotels and conference halls available to host meetings in Addis Ababa.

Discussion

12. Further details were requested regarding the efforts being made to promote the conference centre at ECA. In the light of the inauguration of the conference complex of the African Union in 2012, which had compounded the already fierce competition, one delegation asked whether the United Nations Office to the African Union had explored the possibility of sharing conference services with the African Union. Another delegation suggested adjusting the parameters and criteria that were used to determine the utilization rate of the facilities at the conference centre so as to take into account the various external variables, including the stiffer competition. Other delegations asked whether the increase in competition had had an impact on the budget for the conference centre.

13. A representative of the Secretariat said that the 70 per cent utilization rate for the conference centre at ECA was in fact quite high considering the competition, which came not just from the African Union, but also from many five-star hotels that had been built in Addis Ababa and which provided more extensive facilities. ECA had conducted major radio campaigns, participated in conventions and contacted organizations outside of the United Nations system in order to attract new clients to the conference centre.

B. Impact of the capital master plan, strategy IV (phased approach), on meetings held at Headquarters during its implementation

14. Also at the same meeting, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning the impact on meetings held at Headquarters during the implementation of the capital master plan (see A/67/127, paras. 22-23, and supplementary information, sect. V).

15. One delegation requested detailed information on measures that had been taken to ensure that the electronic voting system would operate smoothly during the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly. Relevant details would be provided by the Secretariat in writing.

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IV. Integrated global management

1. At its 518th meeting, on 4 September 2012, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning integrated global management (see A/67/127, paras. 24-33, and supplementary information, sect. II).

2. In 2011, the Department had continued to apply the proximity rule to meetings held away from the four main duty stations, leading to savings estimated at $1.1 million for the biennium 2010-2011. The Department recognized that the satisfaction of Member States was a key performance indicator of conference management. Their low response rate to the global e-survey on conference services and minimal participation in the two annual language-specific informational meetings on the quality of language services was therefore disappointing.

Discussion

3. One delegation wished to know whether there was any recommendation in the report of the Secretary-General concerning the responsibility of the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management that required a response from the Committee. Other delegations wished to know how the Secretariat had arrived at the figure of $1.1 million in savings stemming from the implementation of the proximity rule and whether there were other potential sources of savings from integrated global management initiatives. One delegation asked whether there was an effective mechanism in place to ensure that the calendar of conferences, which was available one year in advance, was factored into the budgets of the different duty stations.

4. An observer delegation agreed with the suggestion contained in paragraph 27 of the report that there was a need to amend the relevant Secretary-General's bulletins in order to ensure full harmony in the organizational structure and responsibilities of the four main duty stations. One delegation supported the

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recommendation to reduce the number of language-specific informational meetings from two to one per year. Other delegations asked whether concrete steps were being taken to increase Member States' participation in the e-surveys and the informational meetings, as requested in General Assembly resolution 66/233.

5. A representative of the Secretariat said that the main goal of integrated global management was to harmonize the policies, standards and systems used across United Nations duty stations. In fact, many of the benefits, such as the possibility of sharing information technology systems across duty stations and the joint conduct of competitive examinations, could not be quantified. Resources had not been provided for the initiative. Nevertheless, integrated global management did offer the potential of generating savings, for example through the consolidation of processes currently being pursued individually by each duty station, such as the bidding for contractual translation services. The $1.1 million in savings generated by the application of the proximity rule were mostly a result of a reduction in travel expenses. Once the calendar of conferences was established, the cost of each meeting was indeed factored into the budget of the duty station hosting the meeting.

6. The information pertaining to integrated global management did not require action by the Committee but had been offered as an update; the issue of the Secretary-General's bulletins was a matter for internal action by the Secretariat. The Department was doing its utmost to strike the right balance between the responsibilities of the Under-Secretary-General and those of the directors-general. The Secretariat had made extensive efforts to increase the participation of Member States in the e-survey and the language-specific informational meetings, including through announcements in the *Journal*, e-mail reminders and promotion of the e-survey by the bureaux of intergovernmental bodies, yet participation remained low. The Department would welcome ideas concerning ways to increase the volume of feedback received from Member States.

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V. Matters related to documentation and publications

1. At its 519th meeting, on 4 September 2012, the Committee considered section III of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences, concerning matters related to documentation and publications (see A/67/127, paras. 34-50, and supplementary information, sect. VII). In 2011, the overall timely submission rate on document count was 88 per cent at United Nations Headquarters, 74 per cent at the United Nations Office at Geneva, 43 per cent at the United Nations Office at Vienna and zero per cent at the United Nations Office at Nairobi. In terms of the number of author departments and offices meeting the 90 per cent timely submission benchmark, United Nations Headquarters reached 76 per cent in 2011, while the rate was 45 per cent at Geneva and zero per cent at both Vienna and Nairobi.

Discussion

2. Several delegations wished to know what measures the Secretariat was taking to improve the rate of timely submissions by author departments. They also sought more details on the availability of documents in all six languages, the promotion of workload-sharing in the context of global document management and the schedule for digitization of important older United Nations documents. One delegation asked how United Nations documents published on the Internet were authenticated to prevent the wrong version from being posted online. The delegation also drew attention to section IV, paragraph 14, of General Assembly resolution 66/233, on the format of reports, and section IV, paragraph 16, of the same resolution, in which the Assembly called for a more rigorous enforcement of the slotting system. With regard to electronic publishing, several delegations requested information concerning savings achieved through the use of digital printers in place of offset printers. One delegation wondered whether offset printers were still suitable for printing large documents from such clients as the Economic and Social Council and the United Nations Development Programme.

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3. One delegation asked for clarification as to the meaning of the expression "important older documents" used in resolution 66/233 and in the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/67/127). The delegation also wished to know whether the Secretariat would submit a written report to comply with section IV, paragraph 27, of resolution 66/233, in which the General Assembly called for a detailed time frame for the digitization of all important older United Nations documents, including parliamentary documents, and on options for expediting that process within existing resources. Another delegation asked about the precise volume of documents transferred from Headquarters to the other duty stations as part of the workload-sharing arrangement.

4. A representative of the Secretariat said that the Department was fully committed to the simultaneous distribution of documents as mandated by the General Assembly. The rare malfunctions that occurred during the automated process of uploading documents to the Official Documents System were resolved as a matter of priority. Substantial progress had been made over the years on the timely submission of documents to the Fifth Committee, although a few urgent documents still created problems. The interdepartmental task force continued its efforts to minimize disruption in the document production chain, and documents for the Fifth Committee were given the highest priority. The document slotting process was very dynamic and involved many interactions with the different parties concerned. Author departments were reminded every year of their obligation to submit reports following the requisite format, although compliance was somewhat uneven.

5. Workload-sharing in the case of translation took place on an ad hoc, case-by-case basis, depending on the capacity at any duty station at any given time. The same standards of compliance applied at all duty stations; differences in compliance rates could probably be attributed to a lack of capacity or differences in statistical methods used at certain duty stations. The Secretariat controlled the quality of all documents posted on the Internet. When errors were detected after publication, the documents were reissued for technical reasons. Almost all parliamentary documents were printed digitally; offset machines had been almost completely phased out.

Lessons learned from the application of paper-smart meetings on a trial basis

6. At its 520th meeting, on 5 September 2012, the Committee discussed the topic of paper-smart meetings, in particular the lessons learned from the application of paper-smart meetings on a trial basis (see A/67/127, paras. 46-50, and A/AC.172/2012/CRP.1). Representatives of conference services at the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi participated by videoconference; the discussion included the issue of using digital audio files as alternatives or supplements to written records. The Secretariat viewed the paper-smart concept as a more efficient and sustainable way to do business. The use of several new electronic distribution tools and a shift from offset printing to digital printing had significantly reduced the production of printed parliamentary documents during the past three years. The Secretariat was mindful of section IV, paragraphs 23 and 24, of resolution 66/233, in which the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on the emerging concept, including lessons learned. The Assembly, in section II, paragraph 8, of its resolution 66/257, made explicit the requirement that the Assembly approve any related proposals or measures.

7. The paper-smart model was based on the use of a multilingual portal that provided access to documents related to a specific meeting; electronic publishing of documents in formats accessible by a variety of mobile devices; distribution of documents by means of electronic media; and printing of documents on demand. The portal provided different levels of access based on the role that a participant played in a meeting, including as an interpreter, a delegate or a member of the media. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20 to 22 June 2012, had been conducted using the paper-smart model. As a result, most delegations had made their statements available in electronic format, while the use of the portal had offered the visually and hearing impaired a historic opportunity to participate in the discussions. Since the Conference, several intergovernmental bodies had requested assistance from the Department with setting up their own portals for the conduct of paper-smart meetings.

Nairobi

8. As part of its efforts to provide sustainable solutions for conference management, the United Nations Office at Nairobi had developed a guide entitled "Green meeting guide 2009: roll out the green carpet for your participants" and published the *Sustainable Events Guide: Give Your Large Event a Small Footprint* in 2012, which offered examples of arrangements and actions for the conduct of a sustainable event, such as the reduction of conference-related waste and the inclusion of environmental and social impacts in the process of purchasing goods and services for the event. The proximity rule under the principles of integrated global management was a relevant practice used within the United Nations. The paper-smart approach was an important and visible element of a more sustainable and integrated approach towards conference management, which could lead to social benefits for the local community and environmental improvements in general, as well as financial advantages and a positive image for conference organizers. The Division of Conference Services had been facilitating paper-smart meetings for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for years, including the most recent meeting of the UNEP Governing Council. The application of a paper-smart approach during that one-week meeting had resulted in savings of nearly $100,000 in printing costs.

Vienna

9. The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space had agreed to replace their written meeting records with digital recordings of meetings in six languages. The global meetings management system (gMeets) served as the platform for the system. An interface on the Committee's website offered public access to the recordings, which were made available immediately after a meeting. Users could search for a meeting by date or keyword, view a log of speakers for a particular meeting and download the relevant audio file of the floor recording and interpretation booths in all languages. The system had been developed in five months, required a one-time investment of $40,000 and was designed to be easily used at other duty stations. The Committee secretariat and delegations had embraced the use of the system; 741 downloads had been documented in the four months since the system had been launched. The pilot project would run through 2015, and Member States would provide feedback at the next session of the Committee, in 2013. Several intergovernmental bodies had expressed interest in using the system,

including the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law, which would be using the system on a trial basis in parallel with the production of summary records and would later decide whether to replace those records entirely with audio recordings. Intergovernmental bodies that were not entitled to written records could also take advantage of the digital recording system, which offered a cost-effective, efficient and green option.

Geneva

10. Efforts by Member States to consider alternatives to summary records within the framework of the paper-smart concept, such as webcasts and digital recordings, would lead to great efficiency gains, as summary records consumed a significant amount of the Organization's resources. The Human Rights Council and human rights treaty bodies accounted for most of the work of the Division of Conference Management at the United Nations Office at Geneva. In view of the Division's insufficient capacity to meet the needs reflected in its work programme, it was important to note that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in her report on the strengthening of the human rights treaty bodies (A/66/860), had encouraged all treaty bodies to review their entitlement to summary records, noting that, for public meetings, webcasts could replace summary records. The cost efficiency, quality and timeliness of documents would also be greatly enhanced if a word limit were imposed on submissions from States parties to human rights treaties.

Discussion

11. A number of delegations expressed support for the paper-smart concept to the extent that it did not contradict the principle of multilingualism and parity of the official languages. However, they wished to know how the Department collected client feedback on the initial use of the model. One delegation asked whether statements were posted on the paper-smart portal in advance of meetings or after they had been delivered. Several delegations also asked for a clear definition of the paper-smart concept and precise information on its projected costs or savings, especially in relation to on-demand versus mass printing. More detailed information was requested concerning the projected impact of implementation of the model on human resources and any challenges that had been encountered in its initial application; efforts made to ensure the confidentiality, security and archiving of documents; and plans for the maintenance, monitoring and evaluation of the technological platform. One observer delegation pointed out that it might not be feasible to hold paper-smart meetings in some States, owing to a lack of technological or other resources. It would also be useful to know whether a back-up system would be accessible in case of technical difficulties at conference centres and whether a central unit would be established for the coordination of paper-smart issues.

12. With regard to the use of digital audio files as an alternative to written official records, a number of delegations expressed satisfaction with the pilot project undertaken by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. One delegation said that a balanced approach should be adopted when considering the use of audio files as an alternative to written records, given that summary records constituted the official records of meetings. Another delegation asked whether the Vienna pilot project could be expanded to other parts of the Secretariat and whether the production of digital audio files could be outsourced.

13. A representative of the Secretariat said that, under the paper-smart model, the higher cost per page of printing on demand would be offset by the elimination of any mass printing of documents. To gauge client satisfaction with the concept, surveys had been conducted at various sessions. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, statements had been uploaded to the portal, but before delivery had been made accessible only to a handful of users, including the interpreters. As was the case with printed statements, electronic statements had been made accessible to all participants only after the speaker had started delivering the statement. While it was difficult to quantify the human resources implications of the paper-smart concept for the time being, it had clearly reduced the manual labour involved in the conduct of traditional meetings. The important issues of data security and access fell under the purview of the Office of Information and Communications Technology. Should Member States decide to apply the paper-smart model, its large-scale implementation would in all likelihood eventually involve a centralized coordination unit.

14. With regard to the digital audio recording of meetings, some intergovernmental bodies, such as the Human Rights Council in Geneva, had given up their entitlement to summary records and had opted for webcasts, which in some cases were offered gratis by non-governmental organizations. In Vienna, e-surveys and informational meetings with Member States had motivated the development of a digital system for the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. Many delegates also perceived few differences between summary records and session reports, which indicated that they were open to digital solutions.

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VI. Matters related to translation and interpretation

1. At its 519th meeting, on 4 September 2012, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning matters related to translation and interpretation (see A/67/127, paras. 51-64, and supplementary information, sect. VI).

2. According to the report, it was expected that the ability of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to attract and retain the services of freelance language professionals would very likely be enhanced with the coming into force on 1 July 2012 of a new agreement between the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC), and the new agreement between CEB and the International Association of Conference Translators (AITC). The Department needed about 21 language competitive examinations to be held each year to replenish language rosters. However, the limited resources of the Examinations and Tests Section gave it a standing capacity to conduct only eight or nine such examinations annually. With support from the Department, 15 of the most urgently needed examinations would be conducted in 2012. So far, the Department has been able to keep pace with the unfolding demographic transition in the language services.

Discussion

3. Several delegations requested more information regarding the new agreements that had been negotiated between CEB and AIIC and between CEB and AITC, including the ways in which the conditions of employment offered to freelance staff had been aligned with those available to permanent staff and the expected impact thereof on the cost of language services. Details were also requested concerning the measures that were being taken to increase awareness of opportunities for employment in United Nations language services, in particular in sub-Saharan

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Africa, and to ensure that retiring staff were replaced. A precise account of the scope of the shortage of qualified language staff was also needed. Several delegations enquired whether contact had been established with organizations that promoted the official languages of the United Nations. One delegation was interested to know whether competitive examinations were managed at the global level or by duty station and whether there was a system to consistently assign the same interpretation teams to support the same bodies.

4. A representative of the Secretariat said that the new agreements negotiated with AIIC and AITC, which responded to a request from a mandate issued by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, would, inter alia, ensure that freelance staff would be remunerated at a rate equivalent to the P-4 level, receive a social security payment and travel under the conditions dictated by the hiring organization. Most importantly, effective 1 July 2012, the agreement with AIIC had closed the so-called "North American" gap created by the previous agreement, by which United Nations system organizations based in North America had paid interpreters considerably less than those based in other parts of the world. Although costs would likely increase for many organizations, owing in part to a non-regression clause, it was important to note that the agreement had improved the working conditions of short-term staff, which would attract larger numbers of qualified freelance interpreters to work for the United Nations system and had eliminated competition among organizations for such staff.

5. With regard to outreach and recruitment, the Department had worked closely with the Office of Human Resources Management to better plan the competitive examinations, which were coordinated at the global level. Memorandums of understanding had been signed with 21 universities, including the University of Nairobi, which would serve as a link to strengthen the training of language professionals at other African universities. The absence of dedicated resources to conduct outreach activities had limited the possibility of working with organizations that promoted official United Nations languages. However, a dedicated website on United Nations language service careers had been launched and a professional network was being developed with the European Commission, the European Union and other international organizations facing a similar crisis in recruiting qualified language staff.

6. There were some mechanisms in place to review the quality of the translation work done by external contractors. Standardized non-technical documents, such as job vacancy announcements, were sent for translation by agencies, while parliamentary documentation and other sensitive materials, requiring translations of the highest quality, were assigned to staff members. Contractual translation work should not be viewed as fungible with the translation work done in-house; similarly, determining the cost of in-house translation was complicated and any figures in that regard should be treated as nominal.

7. Consistently assigning the same team of interpreters to support the same bodies was referred to as "continuity" and was a factor taken into account to ensure that the interpretation was of high quality, although the complexity of scheduling interpretation teams made it impossible to always assign the same team to the same body. However, interpreters were prepared to handle diverse technical topics and had specialized knowledge on a range of subjects.